

# A SERMON

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UPON

**THE SUBJECT OF CONFIRMATION.**

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*OF WINCHESTER, VA.*

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

A succession of recent occurrences, which need not be now mentioned, constrained the author of this sermon to the unpleasant conviction, that it was his duty to do something in defence of the sentiments and practice of the church to which he belongs,—the validity of whose ordination, and the legality of whose administrations, have been so rudely and industriously assailed of late.

This step was imperiously called for, to prevent our members from being led astray, and to settle the minds of those who were uninformed or staggering upon the subject of this discourse.

It was the author's intention, from the first, to put the sermon to the press after it was delivered. The original draft was very hastily and imperfectly made, amid various interruptions. In transcribing, some few changes and additions have been made; but the ground taken and the arguments used are the same; and the discourse is substantially the same, except a little further expansion of thought and illustration.



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## SERMON.

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ACTS xiv. 21, 22, 23.

And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed, with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

That it is the duty of every minister of the gospel to instruct the people of his charge in the whole counsel of God, according to his ability—to keep nothing back, through fear or favor, but to make them fully acquainted with the scriptures, that they may not only grow in *grace*, but in the *knowledge* of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,—must be admitted by all.

That the truth and order of God's house, and the nature and design of the ordinances and institutions of the gospel, are of vital importance to the cause of true piety, can be doubted by none but those, who, by those very doubts, prove that they have especial need of instruction, whether they know it or not.

You have already been informed, my brethren, that it is my intention, to-day, to discuss a subject about which different denominations of christians entertain different sentiments, and pursue a different practice. Before I enter formally on this subject, I must be indulged in making a few remarks upon the subject of religious controversy in general, knowing that there exists a needless squeamishness, and a morbid sensibility, upon this point.

There are few topics in divinity upon which the different sects do not think, more or less, differently; and this is even the case with members of the same community. Should all these be excluded from the pulpit, we should have a very meager gospel to preach. Neither Christ, nor his apostles, nor our heroic reformers, gave the least countenance to this timid policy, else christianity had never been introduced into this sin-loving world, nor rescued from papal superstition and delusion. No! they contended earnestly and fearlessly for the true faith and practice of the gospel, and have left it as a bounden duty upon us to do likewise. In this time-serving policy there is every thing of the dove but its harmlessness, and of the serpent but its wisdom. We should always be careful to maintain two points, *i. e.* Truth and Love, and we have nothing else to fear.

It is not disputation that does the mischief,—otherwise our Saviour, and his great apostle Paul, had been the authors of much mischief; but it is the



spirit and temper of the controvertists that does so much evil to the cause of religion. He that cannot calmly and dispassionately, yet faithfully and zealously, discuss sentiments different from his own, is unfit for the pulpit. And they that cannot hear others declare their honest convictions of what they conceive to be truth, have more of the spirit of bigotry, and the intolerance of infallibility, than of the meekness of wisdom, or the spirit which characterized the meek and lowly Jesus.

I well know that controversy may be unseasonably introduced, needlessly protracted, and conducted with a very improper temper; but there are occasions which imperiously call upon us to defend the truth, detect error, and put to silence the ignorance and foolishness of men. Whether such an occasion now exists, judge ye; I shall not waste time to examine. I feel the calls of duty strongly upon me, and urging me forward; and this is enough for me. Whoever may be pleased or displeased, shall give me no concern, provided I can approve myself to God, and commend myself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. While I shall try to make truth my compass, love my helm, and the word of God my chart, I shall fearlessly go forward, whatever storms and tempests may abide me.

After these remarks I shall proceed to give you my views respecting true apostolical confirmation, as it is learned from the word of God. In doing this, I shall undertake to shew as well what it *is not*, as what it *really is*.

It is well known that different churches have different sentiments, and pursue a different practice, upon this subject. And this diversity of opinion respects both the nature of confirmation itself, and the persons who are authorized to administer it.

1st. There are those who rank confirmation among the sacraments, and who contend that it is an institution of divine appointment, taught in the scriptures, sanctioned by the practice of the apostles, and has been a uniform practice in the true church of Christ in all ages down to the present time; and that no one is authorized to administer it but a superior order of clergymen, or diocesan bishops. These are the sentiments of the Roman Catholics.

2d. Others agree, as far as I can learn, entirely with the Romanists in all points respecting confirmation, except in withdrawing the name and character of a sacrament from it. These are the sentiments of the advocates of prelacy, or diocesan episcopacy,—for you must know that episcopacy admits of different degrees. All who own and acknowledge the scriptural title of bishop among the clergy, are so far Episcopalians; for that appellation takes its name from the office of a bishop: but all do not agree about the nature and rank of the office of a bishop.

3d. Others hold and practise confirmation as a suitable and appropriate rite, or mode, to be administered by every pastor of a church to those of his charge who had been baptized in infancy, when passing from infant membership to a state of personal responsibility and full communion as church members. These are the sentiments of the Lutherans, and perhaps some few others.

4th. Others contend that no such institution, order, or sacrament, was ever instituted by Christ or his apostles; that no authority for it can be found



in the Bible; and that, to number it among the institutions or ordinances of the gospel, is adding to the word of God, to do which imposes a heavy responsibility. These are the sentiments of the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists, and the great majority of Protestants.

These shall all be examined in their order. They shall be candidly, dispassionately, but fearlessly examined. And wherever truth may appear to point out the path of duty, there, brethren, go, and I will try to go with you. But let us examine calmly and impartially, laying aside all prejudice, previous opinions, and the pride of commitment. Whatever preferences we may have, respecting modes, and forms, and order in the church, let us not trench upon the word of God.

First.—We shall examine the Roman Catholic claims in behalf of confirmation, especially its sacramental character. It is known, I suppose, they enlarged the number of the sacraments to seven—as, 1st, baptism; 2d, the eucharist; 3d, confirmation; 4th, matrimony; 5th, orders; 6th, penance; and 7th, extreme unction. All Protestants contend that there are but two sacraments of the gospel, namely, baptism and the Lord's supper. We shall not waste time, at present, by tracing the word sacrament up to its origin, for it is of heathenish extraction, and not once to be met with in scripture as applied to any divine ordinance.\*

Perhaps it will be thought hardly worth while to consume time upon what appears to have so little foundation from scripture. But it strikes me that the advocates of modern prelatical confirmation among us, who agree with the Romanists in sentiment upon this subject, in all respects, except its right to be numbered among the sacraments, oppose their sentiments with a very bad grace. For I suppose they must have thought there were some considerations, arising from the clearness with which their origin, nature and design, are detailed in scripture, which gave baptism and the Lord's supper a superiority or preference over the other five which are claimed as sacraments, else they would not have differed at all upon this point. But why oppose the papists in giving the character of a sacrament to confirmation and ordination, as well as baptism and the Lord's supper, when they contend equally with them, that they are divine appointments, taught in the scriptures, and so peculiarly sacred, that while baptism and the Lord's sup-

\* The word sacrament, as applied to religious purposes, is not once to be found in the scriptures. It is first to be met with in the Latin translation, or what is now commonly called the Vulgate, which is the only version of the scriptures authorized by the Roman Catholics; and from which version the Psalms, or Psalter, used in the Prayer Book, was taken, and not from the original Hebrew; which is the reason the Psalms or Psalter in the Prayer Book differ so much from the translation of the Psalms to be found in our Bible, the latter being taken from the original Hebrew, and the former from the Vulgate or Latin translation. In this Latin or Vulgate translation, whenever the word *mysterion*, or mystery, is found in the Greek, there the word *sacramentum* is used, and it is applied to a great variety of subjects, and not confined to seven. St. Augustin first gave the definition of a sacrament, which induced the Catholics to fix it to seven only, which was, that "*sacramentum est invisibilis gratiæ, visibilis forma*," or a visible sign of invisible grace. I have in my possession a copy of the opinions, sage counsels, and deep researches of a grave council of bishops and doctors, with Cranmer at their head, in deliberation upon the meaning of the word sacrament, and whether the number of sacraments were two, seven, or more. This curious document would afford both amusement and instruction to the reader, if we had room for so lengthy a publication. The fact is, that the first use that was made of the word *sacramentum*, that we meet with, was, a name given to the oath taken by soldiers in the Roman army, when they swore to be faithful to their general and obedient to all his orders; and hence it was that it got into the Latin translation of the scriptures.



per may be administered by all their three grades of ministers, as well the lowest as the highest, yet none can lawfully administer confirmation and ordination but a superior order of priesthood, *i. e.* diocesan bishops,—I confess I could never see. I do most seriously believe that consistency, at least, is on the side of the papists in this controversy. For baptism and the Lord's supper, admitted by them to be sacraments, compared with confirmation and orders, must either be superior, inferior, or equal. For, take which side you may of this triangle, and you will be beset with inextricable difficulties.

1st. Suppose baptism and the Lord's supper to be *superior* in clearness, sacredness and importance—Why, then, give the power of administering them to common presbyters, and even to subaltern deacons, and allow no one to administer confirmation and ordination but the superior order of diocesan? Do they allow their inferior clergy to do the greater, and not the less important business of the church? Look at it, and see if there is not something here so like metropolitan ambition and assumption, that we cannot well tell the difference? And if time and circumstances would allow of our appeal to history and antiquity, we could trace this with astonishing accuracy.

But 2d. Let us suppose that *baptism and the supper* are inferior, in importance and sacredness, to confirmation and orders, and that this is the reason why none but his *Right Reverence* the bishop can administer the latter; for if the former be not inferior to the latter, here is an important distinction made without a difference. Besides, would it not require a hardihood to acknowledge that confirmation and orders are superior in importance and sacredness to baptism and the Lord's supper, which would shock common sense, and which few would like to own?

3d. But let us suppose them to be altogether equal, which is the only remaining side of the triangle,—yet there is something about confirmation and orders which none but a prelate must meddle with, whether we can understand that something or not: then again we upset the commonest axiom, that things which are equal to one another are equal in all respects, else we destroy their inequality altogether.

But let those who find themselves entangled with these difficulties, extricate themselves the best way they can; and if prelatical Episcopalians should find themselves too hardly pressed by the papists, and will accept of assistance, we think we could render them very prompt and efficient aid, and that would be by showing that they both had travelled far out of the record, and forsaken the Bible; but that, contending as they now do, the Romanists have evidently the vantage ground.

I come now, secondly, to examine the sentiments of our diocesan Episcopal brethren more in detail; for it would be hardly civil to leave them in the unpleasant predicament in which we have just seen them. We shall therefore give their opinions another kind of notice. In doing this, I shall quote a few passages from their ritual; and, as far as possible, to avoid mistake or misrepresentation, I shall give their meaning, *ipsissimus verbis*.

Question from the catechism—"How many sacraments hath Christ or-



dained in his church? Answer—Two only, as generally necessary to salvation; that is to say, baptism and the Lord's supper. Question—What meanest thou by this word sacrament? Answer—I mean an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us; ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof." Now, if this be a true definition of the word sacrament, why withhold its sacramental nature and name from confirmation, after all the importance which is attached to it, I confess I cannot see,—when there is not a syllable in this definition which does not apply to it equally with baptism and the Lord's supper.

But confirmation is by them represented as a rite by which god-fathers and god-mothers are released from their baptismal vows and obligations, and by which the persons confirmed take on themselves personal obligations and responsibilities. Be it so. Then why are persons who had not before been confirmed, but who had been for many years communicants, and had given evidence all that time of true piety, to be required to come and submit to this incipient rite? Is not personal responsibility assumed by coming to the Lord's table? This looks very like an *ex post facto* business altogether. At the close of the ritual for confirmation it is thus determined: "And there shall none be admitted to the holy communion until such time as he be confirmed, or be ready and desirous to be confirmed." How such clergymen, after their ordination vows and subscriptions, can consistently invite and admit christians of other sects (I dare not say churches here), is for them, and not me, to decide.

But, from the direction last quoted, it is admitted that persons *who are ready and desirous to be confirmed*, may be admitted to the communion. It so happened, in this country, before the revolution, when there was no bishop in America, but we all belonged to the diocese of London, that not a member of the Episcopal church in this country could be confirmed, for the want of a bishop; and so they had to live and die without assuming personal obligations to the Saviour, if communing did not answer that purpose.

It has only been a few years since Virginia had a diocesan to administer this rite. A rector of one of these churches, in preparing his people for the first visit of their bishop, for confirmation, preached a sermon expressly on the subject, and urged not only the young people to prepare and get ready, but all the old members to come forward and receive confirmation. But he was so struck with the apparent absurdity of the thing, that in the absence of other and better arguments, he told them they must come forward, whether they could see any benefit to be derived from it or not, for the rules of their church required it; "*and if it would do them no good, it would do them no harm.*" Now I pity a pious evangelical minister, for such I believe he was, who should be under the necessity to preach to, and edify his flock at this rate.

But if communing at the Lord's supper for fifty years, or one's whole life, will not impose personal obligations in purview of this important rite of confirmation, so neither will adult baptism, in riper years, do it; for at the close of the ritual for the baptism of those of riper years, it is subjoined, "It is expedient that every person thus baptised, should be confirmed by the bishop



so soon after his baptism as conveniently may be, *that he may be admitted to the holy communion.*" These things do not hang well together; and afford shrewd grounds to suspect that there is some incoherent mixing of things together, to afford aid to this departure from gospel simplicity, and this assumption of prelatical power.

But it is time we examine these baptismal obligations and personal responsibilities a little more closely, that we may understand their meaning somewhat definitely. And the first thing that strikes our view, in examining the ritual, is the requisition, "That for every male child there shall be two god-fathers and one god-mother; and for every female child, two god-mothers and one god-father; but that the parents *may be admitted as sponsors if it be desired.*" *Apostolical and scriptural requisitions*, no doubt. But we are told that this is a wise and good expedient, whether found in scripture or not, to insure the religious education of children, without which there is reason to fear it would be neglected. "Vain man would be wise," &c. But does not this inference from this, stand forth with great prominence, "That the blessed Saviour, in giving regulations and provisions for the government of his church, left them in such a defective and imperfect state, that human wisdom had to be put in requisition to mend them, and give them efficiency."

But again. Why are parents, whom God has constituted the natural sponsors, to be set aside, unless there should be so much good sense and tenderness of conscience about some, as to make them willing and desirous to perform their own duty to their children? But we well know how rare such sponsors are, compared to the opposite practice.

But as to the wisdom and efficiency of this measure to insure the religious education of children,—shall we be told all this, with a grave face, when we have abundant evidence of the light and thoughtless characters who are generally admitted as god-fathers and god-mothers, and when it is often done as a matter of courtesy or compliment, to say nothing of other motives, by proxy, for persons some hundreds of miles off; and the little care that is taken by those sponsors with the education of these their god-sons and god-daughters, afterwards? I feel such a horror at this prostitution of sacred things, and this unscriptural and unwarrantable practice, that sincere love and regard to the souls of men, constrain me to lift a warning voice and tender expostulation against it.

But let us come to the obligations which these god-fathers and god-mothers take upon themselves. "The minister shall then demand of the sponsors—Dost thou, *in the name of this child*, renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the sinful desires of the flesh, so that thou wilt not follow nor be led by them? *Ans.* I renounce them all, and by God's help will endeavor not to follow nor be led by them. *Quest.* Dost thou believe all the articles of the christian faith as contained in the apostles' creed? (In the name of the child, observe,)—*Ans.* I do. *Quest.* Wilt thou be baptized in this faith? *Ans.* That is my desire. *Quest.* Wilt thou, then, obediently keep God's



holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of thy life?  
*Ans.* I will, by God's help."

I would now solemnly inquire, is this scriptural or apostolical? Does it not shock common sense, not to say piety, and a reverence for God and his worship? Shall we be gravely told, *this is only form and ceremony*, not to be taken in earnest; nor are the words and expressions to be construed in their common acceptance? I reply, Shall the ordinances and worship of God be treated in this manner by those who call themselves christians, and the whole transacted in the name, and by the authority, of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost? Brethren, compassion would again extort from me the pathetic exhortation to beware, for we have God to deal with, and not man.

After baptism is administered "the minister shall say, We receive this child into this congregation, and do sign him with the sign of the cross. Here the minister shall make a cross in the child's forehead." Now shall we derive *this also*, from apostolical authority, think you, or from its legitimate source, anti-christian papal superstition? Shall this any longer be tolerated among christians professing the simplicity of the gospel of Christ?

"The minister shall then say, Seeing now, dearly beloved, that this child is *regenerate*, and grafted into the body of Christ's church, let us give thanks to God for these benefits," &c. "The minister shall then say, We give thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to *regenerate this infant with the Holy Spirit*, to receive him for thy own child, by adoption, and to incorporate him in thy holy church," &c. Hear, also, what the child is afterwards taught in his catechism. "*Quest.* What is your name? *Ans.* N. or M. *Quest.* Who gave you that name? *Ans.* My sponsors in baptism, wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." I would seriously inquire, Are these words to be taken in their obvious and scriptural meaning or not? If they are, as many Episcopalians believe, and strenuously contend, can a more dangerous error and fatal delusion be inculcated upon the youthful or adult mind? If not, but they are to be suffered to pass by as the unmeaning terms of mere form, then what authority have we, or what excuse can we form, for frittering away or softening down the terms and expressions of scripture at this rate? Verily there must be close winking and hard swallowing, with many, to get down and digest all this. Yet this must all pass for apostolical practice.

In fact, such stress is laid upon the regenerating power of baptism, that great pains are taken (I speak advisedly) to urge it upon parents, should their children take sick and be likely to die, and an authorized minister could not be had, rather than let a child die unbaptized, to baptize it themselves, or get any one at hand to do it for them. If this is not cherishing superstition, profaning the ordinance of Christ, and countenancing delusion, I know not what is. This springs very naturally from the quotations we have just been hearing, or we are much mistaken. It is high time that people were awakened and put upon their guard against such opinions.

We have now heard what is meant by baptismal obligations, &c. But how are god-fathers and mothers to exonerate themselves from these mighty



responsibilities? "Then shall the minister add, and say, Ye are to take care that this child be brought to the bishop to be confirmed by him, so soon as he can say the creed, the Lord's prayer, and the ten commandments, and is sufficiently instructed in the other parts of the church catechism set forth for that purpose." If sponsors have any tenderness of conscience about them, it is no wonder they should wish to be released; but whether this measure will fairly do it, is another question. They promised "That the child should renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh; that he should believe all the articles of the christian faith, and that he should keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of his life." And how are they to acquit themselves of this most tremendous list of obligations? Why, by merely teaching the child to commit to memory, and repeat, the creed, the Lord's prayer, the ten commandments, and the short church catechism; and then bring him up to the bishop for confirmation, and the whole work is done, and the bond cancelled.

But I hasten to the closing scene of this apostolical and primature practice. "So soon as the children are come to competent age, and can say the creed, the Lord's prayer, and the ten commandments, and answer the other questions of this short catechism," they shall be brought to the bishop, who (among other things) shall say, "Almighty and everlasting God, who hast vouchsafed to regenerate these thy servants by water and the Holy Ghost, and hast given them forgiveness of all their sins," &c.

That thoughtless youth, and more thoughtless and wicked parents and sponsors, should submit to all this, is not so strange; but that godly evangelical ministers and conscientious christians, for such I verily believe there are, *should go the whole*, is evidence that they do not feel as I do, or that they can slip over words, and prayers, and thanksgivings, and ordinances, and promises, with more facility and dexterity than I can, with such professed solemnity.

Having given a brief but candid statement of the nature, design and professed advantages of confirmation, I shall now examine the authorities upon which its advocates profess to build this rite.

In the first place, this is said to be a practice which has been used by the church from the very days of the apostles themselves, as can be easily proved by the early fathers and ecclesiastical history.

Admitting, for argument sake, this to be a fact, it goes very little way to prove confirmation to be a divine rite. This may appear strange to a person unacquainted with the fathers, or who have only seen garbled quotations which have been passed off as the meaning of the fathers, from one to another, a hundred times told, to build up a favorite system. But whoever has seen how many absurdities and flat contradictions are to be met with in those early writings, will put but little confidence in many things which they profess to have had handed down from apostolical days, and by apostolical authority. The fact is, the written materials for the first two hundred years, or more, of the christian era, are very scanty, defective, and uncertain. Most of the writings of those days have been destroyed; those



remaining have been so long in the exclusive keeping of the corrupt church of Rome, and have been so tampered with, and altered, by what was called pious frauds, &c. that our confidence in them, as they come down to us, must be very much weakened, indeed.\*

But we will grant that something that was called confirmation can be traced from ancient writings to the early days of the church, after the apostles; but it is very difficult to learn precisely wherein this confirmation did consist, or how or why it was performed. One thing is susceptible of abundant proof, and that is, that it differed very widely from modern confirmation, in many important particulars;—such as, that it was administered to all those members who had been under censure, when they were restored as well as when first admitted: it was, like baptism, administered by common presbyters, and deacons, who were the assistants, as well as by the bishops of particular churches themselves; and that it was accompanied with chrism, or anointing with oil in a certain manner.† It is also certain

\* After some centuries, when the church had become considerably corrupt, what was called, by a monstrous misnomer, *pious frauds*, came into very common use. A book that did not suit their views, would be destroyed, or concealed, and another written out under its title or name. Hence a new set of epistles were circulated, under the name of Ignatius, speaking in favor of the innovations and corruptions of the day, which all Protestants agree in rejecting as spurious, and it was a mere accident that those called genuine were ever recovered. And there is strong reason to suspect that they have been also tampered with, in some cases. Many spurious gospels and epistles were put in circulation by ignorant or designing individuals, under the names of apostles, or eminent men, to give them currency. The stupidity, and ignorance, and superstition, and errors of the fathers, would astonish a modern christian, could he be made acquainted with them. They contradict each other, and themselves, in a shameful manner. Without saying more, or wishing to disparage or detract from these fathers, as they are called, I would just observe, that it is a great mercy to us that we have a more sure word of prophecy to go to, from which to learn the religion of Jesus Christ.

† To shew upon what slight foundation some of the fathers of the primitive church, and some of the great reformers of the church of England, would ascribe things to the apostles, I shall give a short quotation from the opinions of those reformers in a council held in the year 1540, which was referred to in a former note. This council consisted of Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury; Lee, archbishop of York; the bishops of London, Rochester, Duresm, Hereford, Carlisle, and St. David's; and the doctors Thirleby, Robertson, Day, Redman, Cox, Leighton, Symmonds, Tresham, Coren, Edgeworth, Oglethorp, Crayford, Wilson and Robins; who gave their answers separately, with their signatures respectively, to seventeen questions proposed to them. The 8th question was in these words: "Whether confirmation, with chrism (cum chrismate), of them that be baptized, be found in scripture?" Archbishop of Canterbury—"Of confirmation with chrism, without which it is counted no sacrament, there is no mention in scripture." Archbishop of York—"To the eighth, we find confirmation with imposition of hands (cum impositione manuum,) in scripture; with chrism (cum chrismate,) we find not in scripture; but yet we find chrismation with oil used *even from the time of the apostles*, and so taken as a tradition apostolick." The bishop of London—"To the eighth, I find in scripture, in many places, *de impositione manuum*, which I think (considering the usage commonly and so long withal used,) to be confirmation, and that with chrism, to supply the visible appearance of the Holy Ghost, which Holy Ghost was so visibly seen in the primitive church; nevertheless, for the perfect declaration of the verity hereof, I refer it to the judgment of men of higher knowledge in this faculty." Bishop of Carlisle—"The imposition of hands, the holy doctors take for the same which we call confirmation, done upon them which were christened before, whereof is written in the Acts. And as for chrisma, it should seem by Cyprian both as touching the *confection* and usage thereof, that it hath a great ground to be derived out of scripture, though it be not manifestly therein spoken of." Dr. Robertson gave his opinion altogether in Latin, but for the sake of my English readers I shall translate it at large, viz: "The thing itself and the effects of confirmation are contained in scripture, namely, the imposition of hands by the apostles upon persons baptized, by which the Holy Spirit was given. Concerning chrism we read nothing there, because during that time the Holy Ghost descended upon the baptized in a visible manner. But when this ceased to take place, the church began to use chrism in the place of that visible sign." Dr. Day—"Confirmation cum chrismate, I read not in scripture, but *impositionem manuum super baptizatos*, I find there is, which ancient authors call confirmation; and inunction with chrism hath been used from the primitive church." Translation from Dr. Oglethorp, written wholly in Latin—"Concerning the imposition of hands with prayer, express mention is made in scripture, which now is called by the usual name of confirmation by the doctors. Holy chrism is an apostolic tradition, as we learn from the ancients." Dr. Symmons—"Confirmation is found in scripture, and confirmation cum chrismate is gathered from the old authors."



that it has changed often, and much, since that day; and it is more than likely that it was early introduced, like many other innovations, and increased, by little and little, without attracting much notice, and making much noise, at any one time. There are many other innovations and corruptions to be met with, quite as early, and all professing to be derived from the apostles; for instance, we have as early and as well authenticated accounts, of infants being taken to, and compelled to receive, the Lord's supper. Why not take the one as well as the other, if this must pass for authority? I had thought that the Bible, and the Bible alone, was the religion of Protestants.

But *the Bible* is referred to, as authority for this practice. Here, then, this cause shall be now tried, and let it stand or fall, as the Bible decides.

It is hard to tell what name to give confirmation, provided we do not call it a sacrament,—whether it shall be called an order, or rite, or institution, or ordinance; but whatever may be its name, it does not even pretend to derive its distinctive name of confirmation from the scriptures. The word *confirmation* is found but twice in the New Testament, and refers to something entirely different. See Phil. i. 7: “In defence, and confirmation, of the gospel.” And Heb. vi. 6: “And an oath, for confirmation, is to them an end of all strife.” And the verb, *to confirm*, with its derivatives, never refers to any rite, or ceremony; so that its *name*, at least, cannot claim apostolical authority.

But its advocates attempt to prove its divine origin from those passages of the New Testament where the apostles are said to have laid hands upon individuals, after baptizing them, and by that means to have conferred the Holy Ghost. Now, in making out this claim, there are several things necessary to be established; as, 1st. That the apostles designed that this should be used as an institution or ordinance of the gospel through all ages. 2d. That they, *in their apostolical character*, were to have successors, with their full powers, to the end of time. 3d. That those claimants are the legitimate apostolical successors. 4th. That they are authorized to confer the Holy Ghost, in the same manner as the apostles did. Should any of these links break, their scheme would fail. But I know not whether such claims would betray more of arrogance or ignorance.

Laying on hands is often mentioned both in the Old and New Testament, and was used upon many and very different occasions; such as, when the Jewish priests laid hands upon the burnt offerings, the scape-goat, &c. &c. It also was used in ordaining, or setting apart to a sacred office; as when Moses laid hands upon Joshua, as his successor.—Num. xxvii. 23. When

Dr. Tresham—“I say confirmation is found in scripture, but this additament *cum chrismate* is not from the scripture; yet it is a very ancient tradition, as appeareth by Cyp. de Unct. Chrism.” Dr. Leighton—“I say that confirmation of them that be baptized is found in scripture, but *cum chrismate* is not found in scripture, but it was used *cum chrismate* in the church soon after the apostles' time, as it may evidently appear by the cited authors.” Dr. Coren—“The laying of the bishop's hands upon them that be christened, which is a part of confirmation, is plainly in scripture; and the unction with chrism, which is another part, hath been observed from the primitive church, and is called of St. Austin *sacramentum chrismatis*.” I have not room for more; but hope my reader is now satisfied to read and construe the Bible for himself, and not learn its contents from these reformers, nor from the usages of the fathers, or of what is called by the primitive church, apostolic tradition, or authority.



the apostles laid hands upon the seven deacons.—Acts vi. 6. The disciples upon Paul and Barnabas, at Antioch.—Acts xiii. 3. The presbytery upon Timothy.—1 Tim. iv. 14. And Paul, either in his apostolical character alone, or in conjunction with the presbytery.—2 Tim. i. 6. But as all these, and such like cases, refer to ordination, which is entirely a different thing, we shall pass them by, as inapplicable to the case in hand.

There are various other passages in which Christ and his apostles are said to have laid hands on the sick and impotent, and healed them. These we shall pass over, as irrelevant. See Mark vi. 5. Luke iv. 40; xiii. 13. Acts xxviii. 8. &c.

There are two passages in which the apostles are said to have laid hands on individuals, newly baptized, and to have conferred the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, so that they immediately spoke with tongues, prophesied, &c. These shall now be carefully examined. Acts viii. 4—25: “Therefore, they that were scattered abroad, went every where preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them; and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city. But there was a certain man called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also; and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles, which were at Jerusalem, heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost: And when Simon saw that, through laying on of the apostles’ hands, the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that, on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me. And they,



when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans."

Acts xix. 1—7: "And it came to pass, that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul, having passed through the upper coasts, came to Ephesus; and, finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And, when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve."

We shall briefly analyze these passages of scripture. First, Acts viii:

Upon the dispersion of the disciples from Jerusalem consequent upon the persecution which arose about Stephen, we find Philip, one of the original deacons, but now also invested with the office of an evangelist, preaching the gospel at Samaria, and working many miracles, as attestations of the truth and authority with which he spoke. Many believed and were baptized; but as Philip was not invested with apostolical authority, although he was authorized to preach and administer the ordinances of the gospel, he could not confer the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost. When the apostles, who were still at Jerusalem, heard that Samaria had received the gospel through the instrumentality of Philip, they sent Peter and John to help forward this good work; who, when they had come, and perceived the favorable state of things, laid hands on many who had believed, and conferred the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, so that they immediately were enabled to speak with tongues, and to work the most stupendous miracles. There was a notable man there, Simon Magus, who had for a long time bewitched the people with sorcery, playing off many a juggling trick, which acquired for him great celebrity, and much gain, no doubt. When he witnessed these things, he also made a profession of faith, and was baptized also; and seeing his arts of imposture so far eclipsed by palpable and obvious miracles, which he could not perform, he offered the apostles money, to induce them to confer this apostolical power, of conferring like gifts upon others, upon him; which was rejected with horror, and his impious act rebuked with great severity.\*

To prove that modern confirmation, which is altogether so different, in all its circumstances and consequences, is to be found in this simple and common-sense statement of facts, would require more ingenuity than falls to the lot of common men.

\* An attempt to procure a church living by bribery or corruption, is, from the conduct of Simon Magus, called *simony*. That Simon wished to obtain the power of conferring the Holy Ghost from covetous motives, may be all true, and is quite likely; but this is mere matter of inference, not stated in the text. But that he wished to *appear and act in apostolical character*, and thereby impart the Holy Ghost to others, is plainly stated; whatever uses he might afterwards make of this power, is mere deduction. *Query*.—Is not an assumption of apostolical character now, and a pretence at being exclusive dispensers of the Holy Spirit, and monopolizers of the grace of God, as well deserving the name of simony?



The passage from the 19th of Acts is substantially of the very same nature, but differing in some of its incidents. Paul coming to Corinth, found twelve disciples, who were but imperfectly instructed in the nature of the gospel; having learned only so much of it, as John the Baptist could communicate, and with whose baptism they had been baptized. Paul asked if they had received the Holy Ghost, meaning his miraculous gifts, since they had believed. Hearing from them that they knew nothing of these miraculous gifts, he explained the nature of John's ministry, and the superiority of Christ's gospel and its ordinances; administered christian baptism according to its prescriptive form, then laid his hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost, and spake with tongues, and prophesied. But to infer the modern rite of confirmation from this passage, is as wild an interpretation as it would be to infer it from Acts xxviii. 8, which I shall quote: "And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux; to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him." In the two cases, the one at Corinth and the other at Melita, we find the same apostolical act of laying on of hands; and the miraculous power of the Holy Ghost following the one as well as the other, and the one is as good authority for confirmation as the other.\* Now these are the passages by which the advocates of modern confirmation boast so loudly that they are able to prove a *jure divino* right for it, from the Bible. I shall take the liberty to deduce a few plain and legitimate inferences from them:

1st. The apostles did sometimes, but not always, as far as we can learn, lay hands upon baptized persons, and confer the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost.

2d. None but the apostles, and that in their extraordinary character, as inspired apostles, pretended to this right.

3d. Miraculous gifts have long since ceased in the church, and it would be arrogant presumption in any one, now, to pretend to any such power.

4th. Miraculous gifts were entirely different in their nature and design, from those influences of the Spirit which were common to ancient and modern times, and by which sinners are regenerated and converted to God, and are enabled to repent of their sins, believe the gospel, and lead a con-

\* I will introduce one more passage which is calculated to throw light upon this subject. Acts x. 44—48: "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost, for they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost, as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." What is remarkable in this passage, is, that there is nothing said about laying on of hands in conferring the Holy Ghost. Also, the Holy Ghost was given before baptism, from which we infer, 1st. That the design of laying on of hands by the apostles, was to confer miraculous gifts alone. 2d. As those miraculous gifts were granted without the agency, and contrary to the expectation of Peter, but in an extraordinary manner, to teach Peter that the door was now opened for the admission of Gentiles into the church, Peter concluded that the imposition of hands was unnecessary; as the thing intended to be conferred by that act was already granted, and therefore forbore. 3d. But if any other influences of the Holy Spirit were conferred by laying on of hands, than miraculous gifts, Peter would not have omitted it on this occasion. Modern confirmation either intends to impart the Holy Spirit, or it does not. If it does not, it is farcical and unmeaning. If it does intend to impart the Holy Ghost, it must be either his miraculous gifts, or his regenerating influences. If the former, it not only fails, but betrays presumption. If the latter, it does what the case of Cornelius teaches us Peter would not have done.



sistent and christian life. Miracles might awaken attention, and attest the truth, but never would convert the soul; "for if they would not hear Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one should rise from the dead." Again: There is reason to believe that many wicked, unconverted men, have possessed miraculous gifts, while entirely destitute of the grace of God. Balaam, while he loved the wages of unrighteousness, and was teaching Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, prophesied, and delivered some of the sublime, impressive, and lively oracles, respecting Jesus Christ, to be found in the Old Testament. Judas wrought miracles, and possessed all other extraordinary endowments, in common with the rest of the apostles. And our Saviour himself, says, (Matthew vii. 21, 22,) "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

5th. There is not a solitary instance upon record, where the apostles laid hands upon any one to confer the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, that persons might repent, believe, and lead a new life; but in all the cases where they did lay hands to confer the Holy Ghost, these persons were already professed disciples, had given credible evidence of their faith and repentance, and had thereupon been baptized.

6th. To use the rite of laying on of hands, by which the apostles in that high character professed to confer miraculous gifts, and actually did confer them, but which have long since ceased, by any one in these times, under a pretence of conferring the regenerating and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, which no one can communicate but God only, is an arrogant assumption of power, and making patch-work out of the word of God. And thus it is, by taking a piece of one thing from the scriptures, and a piece of another, and a bold pretence from another, that modern confirmation has been gotten up, and played off with so much pomp and prelatical confidence.

I shall examine but one passage of scripture more, for I know of no other which is adduced as evidence of the divine right of confirmation, and that is Heb. vi. 1, 2: "Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, and of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment," &c. I once heard it said, by a grave and venerable prelate, while preaching in defence of confirmation, and urging this text as authority, that our great champion, Calvin, admitted that this text referred to this, as a primitive practice among the early christians. I thought then, if Calvin could make this text speak in favor of confirmation, it was more than the text did for itself. It is not the first attempt, however, to reduce us to silence, by a garbled and perverted quotation from Calvin, as if we admitted him as conclusive authority. We leave it to others to build their faith upon uninspired authority. We call no man master upon earth. *To the law, and to the testimony, we appeal. I have, however, consulted*



Calvin upon this text, and find that he had about the same justice done him in this instance that he generally receives when he falls into such hands. He does refer to the opinions of some of the first authors upon this subject, and particularly mentions St. Augustin, but concludes that it was a superstition which ought to be abolished. ("Quamobrem hodie retinenda pura institutio est, superstitio autem corrigenda.")

I shall just give you the sentiments of that pious, candid, and learned Episcopal commentator, Dr. Scott, upon this text, which will give you the true, unprejudiced and unsophisticated meaning. "In this passage," says he, "the apostle proposed to lead the Hebrews into a fuller acquaintance with the deep mysteries of redemption, in order thus to go on to perfection; he would leave the elements of the doctrine of Christ," &c. "He did not, indeed, propose to discourse concerning the doctrine of baptisms, either the various washings, whether by immersion, ablution or sprinkling, or John's baptism, or that of Christ, which were distinct from each other, and much disputed of by many in their nation, nor of the laying on of hands, in the ordination of ministers, as a significant token of the authority entrusted to them, nor would he insist upon the important doctrine of the resurrection of the dead," &c.

I have now given the authorities at large which I have heard from sermons, and read from treatises in favor of this unauthorized rite. Here is the length and breadth of this mighty machine, claiming to be an apostolical rite, and played off with great parade for sectarian and proselyting purposes. But if this were all, the case would not be so serious. I most seriously apprehend that it extensively serves to lull many poor ignorant and deluded souls fast asleep in carnal security, and induces them to cry Peace, Peace, when God has not said peace; and to receive it upon the credit of fallible man, that they are regenerate, and grafted into the body of Christ, when the Judge may hereafter say, depart from me, I never knew you. It may enlist and instigate furious and overbearing bigots, and serve to build up a party at the expense of others, but cannot, will not, promote the cause of virtue and piety in the world. Such are the claims which would unchurch others, without ceremony; represent us as intruders into the sacred office, our ordinances and administrations as illegal, and give over our ministers and our people only to the uncovenanted mercy of God.

Let such, then, give true evidence that they are the truly holy and apostolical church, as they loudly boast themselves to be, by an adherence to scripture, a disconformity to this wicked world in its sinful pomps and vanities, by a consistent and humble christian walk and conversation; and if not by a faithful and uncompromising exercise of apostolical discipline, at least *something that has the semblance of discipline*, and then they may expect some attention will be paid to their pretensions; otherwise we shall regard their bold assumptions only as the great swelling words of vanity.

Thirdly. In setting out I mentioned a third set of opinions respecting confirmation, as held by our Lutheran brethren, and I believe the Moravians; which was, that confirmation was an appropriate and suitable rite, or mode, to be administered by every pastor of a church to those of his charge who



had been baptized in infancy, when passing from infant membership to a state of personal responsibility and full communion, as church members. To these sentiments we see no reasonable grounds to object, provided they do not claim for it a divine and apostolical authority, derivable from the scriptures, as we know some of their number do. Such high claims we should be compelled to confront with the arguments just used in another case. But I know there are others among them who hold it merely as a suitable and an impressive mode, adopted from principles of human expedience, to be used upon such occasions. Such sentiments and practice, instead of deserving censure, shall receive my entire consent and approbation.

It was my intention, before taking leave of my Lutheran friends, to have offered them, in the spirit of love and friendship, my sentiments respecting the very loose and superficial manner in which young persons are often catechised into the church, without due vigilance in requiring an experimental acquaintance with religion, and a consistent walk and conversation. I felt the more inclined to discharge this act of christian friendship, because I well know that many Presbyterian churches are pursuing the same loose practice, and come under the same censure. This is of very dangerous tendency, and one that will hang as dead weights upon any society, and give more than a little trouble at some future day.

But I have not time enough left for this at present, whatever I may think it my duty to say upon this subject, upon some future occasion.

Fourthly. I have time only to say a few things respecting the sentiments of Presbyterians, and other sects agreeing with them, and making a large majority of the Protestant world, viz: That neither Christ nor his apostles ever instituted any such rite, order, ordinance or sacrament, as confirmation in the church; that no authority can be found for it in scripture, nor deduced from it without torturing and wresting the word of God; and that, to number it among the ordinances, is adding to the word of God under a fearful responsibility.

Our text, as well as other parts of scripture, tells us that the apostles were in the practice of visiting from church to church, and confirming the souls of the disciples wherever they went. So also Acts xv. 41. And Paul went through Syria and Silesia, confirming the churches. But it might appear like an attempt at burlesquing the diocesan confirmation which we have just been examining, were we to quote these passages of scripture in connexion with that practice. Think you they laid their hands upon thoughtless boys and girls, and more thoughtless and vicious adults, merely because they could repeat the creed, Lord's prayer, ten commandments, and a short catechism, "and then thanked God that it had pleased him to regenerate these disciples, and praying to God that they might finish the rest of their life according to this beginning?" No! No! The apostles never did so. But we are not left to conjecture what they did, or what kind of confirmation they practised. We need no far-fetched conclusions, nor bold assumptions, to come at their practice. We have it in plain terms; he that runneth may read it, and the way-faring man, though a fool, need not err in finding it out. "They preached the gospel" unto them; "they taught



them;" "they exhorted them;" they forewarned them "that through much tribulation they were to enter into the kingdom of heaven;" for vigilant inspection, government and discipline, "they ordained them elders in every church;" "they prayed and fasted" among them; and in leaving them "they commended them to the Lord on whom they believed."

It was their practice to comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, warn the unruly, admonish, reprove and censure the backsliding and the unfaithful, and to excommunicate the incorrigible.

Here, here is true apostolical confirmation. Plain, faithful preaching the gospel, and exercising discipline. No showy, pompous rite or ceremony, but the simple ordinances of the gospel. No exclusive prelatical assumption of power, nor unchurching of others,—for Barnabas, and Silas, and Mark, and Timothy and Titus, and many others, all bore a part in this kind of confirmation. No splendid robes, or lawn sleeves, did they use or require, as an offset to their administrations; but in cold and comparative nakedness did they confirm their poor brethren, and remind them through much tribulation they must enter into the kingdom of heaven. Hear what a contrast Paul draws between himself and his co-workers, and some bold pretenders in his day: 1 Cor. iv. 8, &c.—“Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us. For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed unto death. We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honorable, but we are despised; even unto this hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place.” Such was the contrast formerly between Paul and his fellow-laborers, and his time-serving, Judaizing opponents. Where shall we look for the true, holy and apostolical church, in our own times? Ah! that is the rub. Shew us such ministers, such disciples, such self-denial, such zeal and non-conformity to the world, and such a church, and it would not stumble all belief should they set up claims as being the holy apostolical church. But, alas! such are rarely, if ever found, now-a-days.

Could such be found, to them, methinks, I would willingly resign myself, my commission, and my poor little flock, that we might set at their feet, learn of them, and follow in their train. Till then, we must try, in our poor way, to get to heaven the best way we can; taking God's word for our guide, hope for our helmet, faith for our shield, and earnest and persevering prayer for our daily exercise

And may God, in his infinite mercy, direct us into all truth, and speed us onward in our heavenly journey. Amen.